Commencement text scheduled for delivery in St. John Arena
FOR RELEASE: 9:45 a.m. (EST) TUESDAY, DEC. 20, 1966.

By Roger Tatarian
Vice-President and Editor
United Press International

Commencement address
The Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio
Dec. 20, 1966.

THE NEW PERSPECTIVE

I have never been quite certain whether it is meant as reward or punishment, but it is nevertheless one of the quaint rituals of our culture that after young men and women have put up with four or so arduous undergraduate years of listening to their elders, they are at the end asked to assemble once again and expose themselves to just one more of their chronological superiors before taking final leave. So I stand before you today somewhat in the nature of the last obstacle between you and the commencement of more important things that this occasion really is intended to signify. I will not forget that the thing to do with obstacles is remove them.

I want to begin by congratulating you on several counts. First, for having selected this great center of learning as the site of your studies. Second, for having successfully completed the prescribed course of study in your chosen fields. Both of these involved voluntary decisions and efforts on your part. On the third, the congratulations perhaps should be shared with your immediate forebears, for it concerns the matter of timing that has caused you to begin your post-graduate adulthood at this particular juncture of world history.

This is not to say that the world today is in the most blissful state it has ever been in. On the other hand, neither is this the most dismal of times. But I doubt there has been a more exciting and potentially promising period. We are somewhere over the threshhold of what could be one of the most richly productive periods of human history. Whether it will be depends to great measure on the solution of certain problems which could also make it one of the most cataclysmic of times. Since these problems are mostly of our making, the solutions happily cannot be said to be outside our capability.

This month marks a quarter century since the start of World War II. This is a period of time that probably spans the lives of most of you here. Doubtless it contains some monuments to the human folly. But it also contains more truly epochal achievements than can probably be found in any other comparable period of recorded time.

Here we get on dangerous ground, and it would be well to bear in mind five words that are inscribed in stone on the Archives building in Washington: "What is past is prologue." As with so much of Shakespeare, this is capable of various interpretations. I prefer to take it as a sobering reminder against self-congratulation. However imposing your deeds or other deeds already done, they are but the preliminaries of greater things still to come.

It is only natural, I suppose, that every generation of mankind is tempted to regard itself and its accomplishments with a particular satisfaction, and to look upon the work of its predecessors with a certain condescension. We face the same temptation. But I hope that future generations will not regard it as totally presumptuous on our part if we confess to feeling a great singularity for our generation. If nothing else, we have produced two achievements that tower in the course of human progress. Whatever else the future may say of us, it must say that the energy of the atom was released in our time, and that ours was the first generation to overcome the tyranny of earthly gravity and to send man wheeling into the first suburbs of space.

The explosion of science in our times is as dramatic and more portentous than the outpouring of the arts in the Renaissance. It is now a popular statistic that of all the scientists who have ever lived, 90 per cent are alive and working today. In every branch of the physical and natural sciences, the accomplishments of these men and their related technologists are correspondingly vast. It is their work that holds out such rich promise for the future.

It took our forebears centuries to proceed from the simple wheel to the self-propelled vehicle. With this in mind it is almost impossible to think that just 63 years and three days have elapsed since the Wright brothers achieved man's first faltering flight at Kitty Hawk. What immense strides have been made in that brief flash of time. We have sent men hurtling into space to rendezvous with orbiting objects. We take it for granted that machines with men in them will before long be making the voyage to the moon and coming back again.

Our first thrust into space did more than begin man's journeying to the moon and beyond. It gave us something other men had never before achieved--a physical detachment from our terrestrial prison and a unique ability to look back on our world from a vantage point outside it. And this made us the very first of mankind really to see the world as a single place.

The schoolboy of the infant 20th century knew the world to be the sum total of a large assortment of countries and continents, separated by vast oceans or towering ranges of mountains that could be crossed only with difficult travel. It was enough not too many years ago only to refer to the "four corners of the earth" or to "sailing the seven seas" to conjure up concepts of vast and almost limitless dimensions. Suddenly these expressions no longer serve. Today any schoolboy knows that the globe can be circled in 90 brief minutes. He has the beginning of a totality of outlook that would have been beyond the comprehension of his counterpart a generation or two ago.

He, like the rest of us, is the first of mankind to realize with the testimony of his own eyes the singleness of our globe, and to realize better than any of our predecessors its relative insignificance in the cosmic order of things. It is this universality, this totality, of outlook that is bound, I think, to have a great effect on our concepts and attitudes toward some of our own earthly problems in the years to come.

What has happened is that our outlook suddenly is capable of reversal, and we find things as different as does the man who turns the telescope around to look at a familiar sight. Heretofore it was anchored to ourselves, and ranged outward from the small to the large. It began with me, then my family, my community, my country, my continent and only then, and only remotely, my world. Mankind heretofore has never been able to achieve a detached global view of his problems. At best his thoughts have been couched in national terms, a yardstick that is too often inadequate.

Now we have the makings of a new perspective. We can begin with the large--and even that we find is suddenly more finite than we had imagined. We can see from our first foothold in space the sweeping curve that marks off a section of our globe. After that, in descending order, the arc of a continent perhaps, and here and there a discernible cape or peninsula. We are struck by the very oneness of the place. And we find that man-made boundaries and even majestic mountain ranges that seem so formidable here on earth take on a new insignificance. And the rest of the familiar chain--a country, a community, a home and an individual--they are not discernible at all.

This ability literally to see the world as a single place--as our place, without the rigid compartmentalization between this country or this people and that--will, I think, help us cope more successfully with some of the great problems that are now upon us. One of the greatest of these is the grave menace we pose to ourselves with our own numbers. This is popularly known as the population explosion. It is something we have tended too long to regard parochially, as someone else's problem that was only of academic interest to us.

In terms of numbers the story of world population is at once simple and terrifying.

Three hundred years ago the population of this globe is estimated to have been perhaps 500 million. It took two centuries for this to double to one billion. That took us up to 1850. By 1920, just 70 years later, it had doubled again to 2 billion. By 1960, just 40 years later, and only six years ago, it rose to 3 billion. Today it is reckoned at 3 billion 400 million. And the most authoritative forecasts are that by the end of this century--just 33 years from this moment--the figure will be close to 7 billion, barring some dramatic and effective worldwide system of birth regulation, of which there is no serious sign, or of world war, famine or pestilence, which no one can want.

How are we to avoid being engulfed by our own numbers, and how are these mouths to be fed? These questions dwarf almost any other that faces us, and time is running against us in finding the answer. The White House Conference on International Cooperation last year used these words to pose the problem: "The rate of growth of world population is so great--and its consequences so grave--that this may be the last generation which has the opportunity to cope with the problem on the basis of free choice." Despite the great strides in the efficiency of agriculture, half of the world's population today lives on a substandard diet ranging from malnutrition to famine. And it grows worse rather than better because production of food is not even today keeping pace with human proliferation. The net increase in population today is about 180,000 daily. That rate is such that every three days enough people are added to the world to populate a city like Columbus. Not too many years will elapse before it will happen every two days and then every day and then faster.

We have for too long taken comfort in the fact that the most alarming population increases are not in our country but in distant places--in China, in India, Africa and Latin America. With our new-found perspective we may understand better that it is only self-delusion to think of this as someone else's problem. It is a problem of our world and therefore our problem.

We have also been tempted to regard our own food production capability as prodigious, sufficient not only to feed ourselves but others too. Our chief problem in the past has indeed been the prevention of price-depressing surpluses.

Today surpluses of milk, vegetable oil and rice exist not at all. And our reserves of wheat and feed grain have dipped below the figure that many experts regard as safe. The government has had to revise its 1967 production program to get more grain acreage. Obviously we ourselves are in no difficulty because we can produce more than we have been. But our numbers are growing and so will the world's reliance on us. And our own well-being cannot in the long run be separated from that of the rest of the world.

On the basis of sheer numbers no single country has these problems in the magnitude of China. They are basically the cause of the convulsions that have shaken China since the last war, and thus the cause of our foremost problem in international relations. What, if anything, should we be doing about it? Should we, as we are doing with India, help her despite our other difficulties, in regulating the world's most burgeoning national population and in developing techniques for feeding it? Would we do so only at our peril? Or is there greater peril in closing our eyes to it? These are questions that your generation will have to help answer, and the answer will have to come rather sooner than later.

Whatever its shortcomings in other areas, the United Nations does at least provide a ready-made organization through which to undertake a really effective global effort to control human proliferation and to increase the production of food. It will need far greater resources than it now has to cope with it effectively. The cost will be enormous, but the question is not whether the world can afford it. It is rather whether the world can afford not to do it.

I referred at the outset to mastery of the atom as one of the two great achievements of our times. It is outside my competence to forecast the specific benefits that it will bring. We recognize in a general way that it will be serving us in many ways in the decades immediately ahead. But it may be--and I say this with perhaps more hope than conviction--it may be that it has already performed its greatest service. In the course of history, man's desire to abolish war has been exceeded only by his talent for waging it. I do not proclaim the arrival of the millenium but there is at least some reason to hope that the world may be spared another general war by the realization that there can be no victory for anyone in a nuclear conflict.

Other factors have contributed to it, of course. But it is a fact that nuclear stalemate between the United States and the Soviet Union has been followed by an unprecedented period of tranquility in their relations.

There is no question that the Soviet Union lived in mortal fear of the United States in the days when we held a nuclear monopoly. As ill-founded as this fear might have been, the fact is that it existed, and it manifested itself in a suspicion and stridency that poisoned the general atmosphere. I wonder if it is too much to hope that China will be easier rather than harder to live with when she achieves full nuclear status. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that China's stridency and bellicosity, like Russia's in another era, stem in great measure from a realization of military inferiority. This may well be straining to find a silver lining in the cloud cast by a militant China determined to become a nuclear power. But since we are powerless to stop her, we should at least be aware of the possibility that the result need not necessarily be a dire one for the world at large. The Chinese have professed not to be impressed by, or to be indifferent to, the destructive power of nuclear weapons. Perhaps their own tests will convince them, as the United States and Russia are already convinced, that nothing can be gained by exchanging them in anger.

The changes that will inevitably occur in our relations with China cannot stem only from us. China must contribute to them too. And in the internal differences that seize China today, I think there is evidence that change will come. When it will come is impossible to say, just as it is impossible to gauge the extent of the dissent from the hard and doctrinaire policies of the present. What is important is that dissent does exist and clearly it is growing, for it can no longer be kept from the sight of the outside world.

If the course of the Soviet revolution is any precedent, it is not unreasonable, I think, to believe that the passage of time will moderate China's relations with the rest of the world and convince her that peaceful coexistence of opposing doctrines is not only possible but is the only alternative to mutual destruction. The world has become at once too small and complex for any one people to try to stand aside on its own terms. This, I think, was the message that John Donne had in mind for nations as well as individuals when he wrote that no man is an island, entire of itself.

We do not have to look at the affairs of nations but to our own internal affairs to observe the increasing validity of this observation. The growth of our own numbers and the mounting complexity of our society, of our own individual interdependence--these are bringing new strains and new tests on some of the social concepts that have served us so well in the past. Nowhere perhaps is this as true as in the status and rights of the individual in his historical struggle against the many.

The dignity and well-being of the individual are very properly the starting place in our political thinking, and the refining and strengthening of individual rights have always been of paramount concern. But I see little alternative in the future to some subordination of the rights of the one in the interests of the many.

Observe what has happened and what is happening to a nation that began as a band of rugged individualists proud of their own self-sufficiency. We are being clustered together more and more every day in a manner that makes our interdependence, our reliance on each other, ever more acute for services and products that men not too long ago provided for themselves.

To put it another way, all of us every day become more helpless to cope for ourselves in a society that steadily becomes more complex and sophisticated. If it is correct that ours are the world's highest standards of living, the other side of the coin is that we, individually, are more dependent on each other than any other people in the world.

We as individuals cannot even provide ourselves with the water we drink. We can drink only if people who are total strangers to us do their assigned tasks at distant places at the assigned time. What has happened, and what will inevitably happen to greater and greater degree, is the growth in the number and scope of activities that are essential to the general welfare. And this in turn will revive more and more one of the great contests of a democracy--how to reconcile the rights of the many and the rights of the few.

I believe I am as jealous of individual rights as any other individual. But I could not help wondering during the transit workers' strike in New York in January, if it had suddenly been forgotten that a majority is also made up of individuals. Their only sin is that there are more of them.

And here we had a case where 37,000 individuals, by withholding their labor, caused acute hardship and even some suffering in a community of from eight to ten million other individuals who were no more than hostages in a contest over which they had no direct control. The recent airline strike was perhaps an even more dramatic case in point.

It is important, in a democracy, that a majority not do violence to the minority. But it is no less important to keep the reverse from happening in certain vital areas. As our society grows more complex, it will become more imperative that we work out safeguards to prevent the many from becoming the helpless pawns of the few.

This is going to be of great concern to all of us no matter what particular field of endeavor we choose to follow. We are going to have to evolve a more workable definition of essential services and of the general welfare. This is going to demand a new attitude toward the traditional right to strike of individuals in certain types of employment.

There are precedents here that will have to be extended. American citizens who work for the federal government now are required to sign no-strike pledges. And about 16 states have adopted legislation prohibiting strikes by public employes. The fact, is, however, that there are many types of services that are no less essential to the public welfare than those provided by federal and state employes.

I find it difficult to escape the conclusion that this same concept will have to be imposed on all services such as water, gas, communications, electricity and transport that are supplied by private enterprise under federal or state regulation. If these services are so vital to the general welfare that they require price regulation, certainly the same importance requires that they be provided without interruption.

Yet the civil service concept can hardly be extended to many of these services without drastically altering the private nature of the enterprises that provide them. So some other route must be followed, and the makings of it are already provided in the form of compulsory arbitration.

This is going to be difficult to work out but our individual helplessness to do without them requires that it be done. It would be wrong and impossible to work it out on compulsory lines unless the welfare of the individuals concerned is safeguarded in the process. Anyone who waives or is denied the right to strike as a condition for employment is already in a category different from most of his fellow citizens. He must not, economically speaking, be made a second-class citizen at the same time.

The generation preceding you thus has bequeathed to you great problems along with some great accomplishments. In this it can claim no singularity at all. It was the same with their forebears and with theirs before them. But perhaps you are inheriting a unique advantage--the beginnings of a new ability to look with unprecedented detachment back on our world and to regard it and its problems with a wholly new perspective. Man's history without this totality of outlook has been too often a tragic one. With it, perhaps the future may succeed where the past has failed.

--0--

#